



Early Years Are Learning Years: A Sound Investment

Why is Early Childhood Education Important?

Early Childhood is an essential time for children to learn as this is when the foundation of learning is cemented for the rest of their lives. Children benefit developmentally, socially, and academically from participating in high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs. A plethora of research studies have indicated that high-quality early education promotes school readiness, literacy/numeracy skills, and other positive short and long term outcomes.

■ Short-Term Impacts

Research strongly suggests large short-term benefits in areas of “school readiness” which include cognition, language, and social and emotional development. These findings are consistent across small programs as well as large public programs such as public pre-K. Studies show children who attended pre-K were ahead of children who did not attend pre-K in pre-reading skills, pre-writing skills, and pre-math skills. The findings clearly convey significant growth as a direct result of early care and education programs. Additionally, researchers found substantial improvement in literacy, numeracy, and math skills. Furthermore, the children demonstrated increased executive functioning and emotion recognition.

■ Long-Term Impacts

Primary long-term effects of early care and education include higher rates of high school completion, attendance, and employment. These findings illuminate the efficacy of educating children in the early years – the skills they develop increase the likelihood of success in further education. Socially, children also exhibit decreased behavior problems, grade retention, and criminal activity. Early care and education yields significant economic returns and a positive benefit cost ratio – not only to school districts but society as a whole.

During the first five years of life, tremendous growth occurs in intellectual, social, and emotional competence. High-quality early care and education programs promote an encompassing array of positive childhood and life outcomes – these benefits accrue to all children, with low income, African-American, and Latino children showing the greatest gains. Children who receive high-quality, developmentally appropriate early care and education are positioned for greater success in school and life.

According to Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel Laureate in Economics, “There is a strong case for public support for funding interventions in early childhood. The economic returns of early investments are high. What is socially fair is also economically efficient.”

—Morrissey, Taryn, Lindsey Hutchison,
and Kimberly Burgess. (2014).

“The Short and Long Term Impacts of Large Public Early Care and Education Programs.” (Policy Brief 1-4). Retrieved from http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/14/longTermImpact/rb_longTermImpact.cfm

